

QUEER SCREEN PROJECTION

What's new, What's gay, What's on the way.

by Daniel Mangin

QUEER SCREEN



Photo: Michael Wallin

No Thanks, We're Vegans: A scene from Michael Wallin's *Black Sheep Boy*, which PBS found too meaty to swallow.

because it is educational in its own curious, ironic way and allows us to raise the subject of homophobia yet again." Here's hoping the hubbub propels UND out of "hate the sin, not the sinner" mode.

A Lesson for Filmmakers Everywhere:

One of the best shorts making the '95 gay film-fest circuit is Michael Wallin's *Black Sheep Boy*, which the forty-something director describes as being "about the pleasures and pitfalls of being attracted to much younger men." In an apparently giddy moment in 1993, the Independent Television Service (ITVS) green-lighted the project. The filmmaker always assumed there'd be a more explicit "director's cut" and a TV version, but didn't want to censor himself in advance, so he submitted the racier one to see what would and wouldn't float.

Breach of Contract: ITVS flipped out over the rough cut and declared Wallin in breach of contract. He then recut *BSB* into what he calls "a G-rated *Mary Poppins* version, which I felt was in total compliance with their concerns: 'no nudity below the waist and no profanity.'" The plug was pulled anyway. ITVS, which is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, was created to "encourage the development of programming that involves creative risk." It has a proven track record of support for gay work, but has been accused of embracing challenging projects and then backing away or otherwise not getting them into the public TV mainstream. This seems redundant: Don't we already have PBS to do this?

Standards Weren't Met? ITVS director of production David Liu said that *Black Sheep Boy* was dropped because it didn't meet PBS's broadcast standards (they've shown worse), wasn't experimental enough (when's the last time anyone complained about *that*) and didn't engage its subject matter intellectually (don't agree). "It boiled down to the matter of craft," Liu said. "It's very explicit, but that's not the problem. Michael said in his proposal he wanted to get away from stereotypical portrayals, to correct the unbalanced and stereotyped portrayal of gay male sexuality. Don't you think *Black Sheep Boy* stereotypes gay men?"

Desire Under the Helms: No, *Black Sheep Boy* doesn't stereotype gay men. Wallin presents a thinking, feeling human being who's seeking self-knowledge—hardly the activities of a stereotype. Artistically, *BSB* has links to experimental classics such as Jean Genet's *Un Chant d'Amour* and Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* but addresses the philosophical and psychological implications of desire more directly. Wallin's film repeats itself near the end, but is a unique document nonetheless. Yes, it would have brought some heat from Jesse Helms and those out to scuttle publicly financed art, but since that is obvious from the proposal, why fund it in the first place?

So Was Explicitness a Problem or Not? "Its being explicit isn't really the question," Liu maintained, but then a moment later said, "Basically, a lot of stations wouldn't carry nudity. All Michael dealt with [in the 'G-rated' version] was cutting out blatantly genital shots. There are other nude shots. It merely was an excised version and that wasn't the real problem. That was part of the problem. If the rest of it was really wonderful and rare it wouldn't have been [a problem] ... but the nudity is a separate question." OK, so the explicitness wasn't, was or was partly a problem. Or a separate question altogether. (Sounds like it was a problem.) *